

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Marvelous Manatees

By Guy Belleranti

Manatees are large and graceful aquatic mammals. They live in shallow slow-moving rivers and coastal areas with warm-water climates.

There are three species of manatees. One lives in fresh water in South



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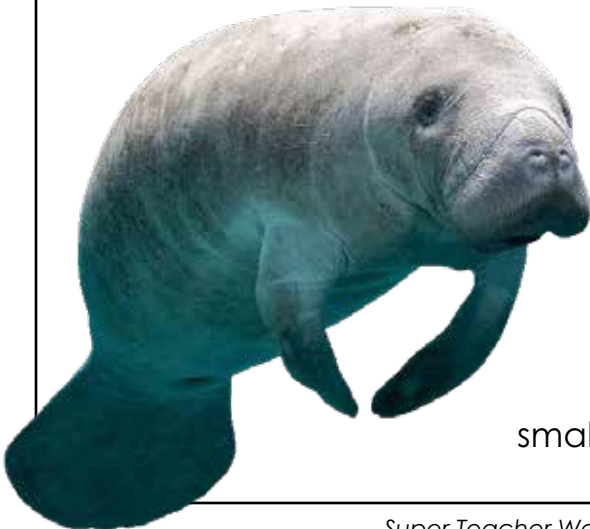
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Manatees have long, flattened lungs along their backbones. The lungs provide buoyancy, helping them float in the water.

Manatees breathe through their nostrils. With one breath at the water's surface, they replace 90 percent of old air with

new. In comparison, humans only replace 10 percent of air per breath. The manatee's great air exchange allows for extended dives to eat plants such as sea grass. While most dives last only 2 to 5 minutes, some last as long as 20 minutes!

Transparent membranes protect a manatee's small eyes while it swims. Manatee ears are also



small, but their hearing is good. Sensitive face whiskers help them navigate underwater.

Manatees paddle with their tails and steer with their front flippers. The flippers also help them pull plants into their mouths. The upper lip is prehensile and grabs vegetation much like an elephant's trunk. In fact, the elephant is their closest land-living relative!

The tiny nails on the end of manatee flippers are similar to elephant toenails. The animals' thick gray skin and sparse hair are also similar. And both have "marching molars." These teeth grow at the back of the jaw and slowly move forward replacing molars worn down from grinding vegetation.

Mother manatees give birth underwater to one calf. The calf is 3 to 4 feet (0.9 to 1.2 m) long and weighs up to 70 pounds (32 kg). The calf remains with



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1. In which U.S. state would you be *least* likely to find a manatee living naturally?
  - a. Florida
  - b. Texas
  - c. Georgia



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3. What animal is the manatee's closest land-living relative? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What are "marching molars"?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. About how many pounds will a manatee gain throughout its life?
  - a. 450 pounds
  - b. 930 pounds
  - c. 70 pounds
  - d. 700 pounds

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Fill in the missing letters to create a vocabulary word from the article. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.



1.    l i    a    e



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clue: see-through

5. m       b    a n      

clue: a thin layer

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6.    a v    g    t e

clue: to get around

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. p    e h       s i    e

clue: able to grab

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. v       e t    t i    n

clue: plants

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. s    n    t u a      

clue: a safe place

9. \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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In the article, "Marvelous Manatees," you learned that the manatee is the official marine mammal of the state of Florida.

Use the internet to find an animal that is a symbol of your state or country. If you live in Florida, pick an animal other than the manatee. Research the animal. On the lines below, explain why the animal represents the place you live, and include at least



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5. About how many pounds will a manatee gain throughout its life?
- a. 450 pounds
  - b. 930 pounds**
  - c. 70 pounds
  - d. 700 pounds

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8. v e g e t a t i o n

*clue: plants*

8. vegetation

9. s a n c t u a r y

*clue: a safe place*

9. sanctuary